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ABSTRACT

This report is a retrospective account of a single research project conducted between 1973 and 1976 which involved a field study of the administrative feasibility of vouchers for skill training in the Work Incentive Program (WIN) in Portland, Oregon. (The program was designed to change relationships among clients, WIN staff, and training vendors, by transferring responsibility for decision making and negotiations for training arrangements from staff to clients--nondirective counseling.) Focus in this report is on how evaluation research or feasibility testing (using the implementation of the WIN voucher system as an example) can be effected by staff noncooperation, problems of intra- and interagency coordination, and other variables (e.g., goal conflict, communication). A sixteen-page concluding section discusses literature concerned with program evaluation and describes elements which might go into a systematic approach to program implementation analysis. Suggestions for ways in which a two-level approach to evaluation research might increase the clarity, comprehensiveness, and sophistication of research results are also included. (SH)

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THE FEASIBILITY OF FEASIBILITY TESTING: OBSERVATIONS FROM THE PORTLAND WIN VOUCHER TEST

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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By

Carol Greenhouse

With a Foreword and A Comment on Some Larger Issues

By

Ann Richardson

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15. Supplementary Notes Findings of the study to which this report refers are found in: Richardson (BSSR 0085-2), Richardson and Sharp (0085-2 and 0085-5), Dunning (0335-4 and 0335-5), and Dunning and Unger (0335-3). Other reports are forthcoming.

16. Abstracts This report is a retrospective account of a single research project. Between 1973 and 1976, BSSR undertook a field study of the administrative feasibility of vouchers for skill training in the Work Incentive Program (WIN) in Portland, Oregon. The program was designed to change relationships among clients, WIN staff and training vendors, by transferring responsibility for decision-making and negotiations for training arrangements from staff to clients. The requirements of the study affected some established informal and formal working relationships between (and among) WIN on-line staff, clients, and administrators, as well as among levels of WIN's administration. The report specifically discusses the effects of staff non-cooperation, self-initiated adaptation (cooptation) of the experiment's rules, and problems of intra- and inter-agency coordination. Richardson's concluding comments place this case study in the context of evaluation research in general.

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FOREWORD

In 1973, under a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor, the Bureau of Social Science Research undertook an assessment of the administrative feasibility of the introduction in the Work Incentive Program (WIN)[1] of a voucher system for skill training. The program was designed to rearrange relationships among clients, WIN staff, and providers of training, by transferring responsibility for decision-making and negotiations for training arrangements from staff to clients, and shifting the staff role from that of intermediary between client and trainer to one of provider of information services for clients.[2]

The original feasibility test called for issuing vouchers for vocational school training to a limited number of clients, and addressing several concrete issues of administrative feasibility:

- whether program participants would find their responsibilities as voucher clients acceptable, or whether they would prefer intercession by WIN program staff with potential trainers;
- whether clients could find suitable training within the limits of the program guidelines;
- whether members of the WIN staff would be able to shift the emphasis in their work from mediation of the relationship between client and trainer to that of facilitation and provision of information; and
- whether trainers (vocational schools, and later, employers) would accept voucher clients as trainees without prior screening or intercession by WIN program staff.

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[1] Briefly, WIN provides placement and training services to certain recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). The program is jointly administered by the Departments of Labor and Health, Education, and Welfare. At the local level, the two administrative arms are the Employment Service (ES) and a Separate Administrative Unit (SAU) which provides for day care for the children of WIN participants, medical care, and other social services.

[2] For details on various aspects of the project as a whole, see Dunning, 1976a and 1976b; Dunning and Unger, 1975; Richardson, 1977; Richardson and Sharp, 1974 and 1975. Several additional reports are currently in preparation and will be published during 1977.

Following the completion of the institutional training study ("Phase I"), the project was simultaneously expanded to include follow-up evaluation of training and labor force outcomes of the voucher recipients, and extended (in "Phase II") to a test of vouchers for on-the-job training (OJT). The grant was modified again to provide for a test in 1976 of a voucher program which offered both modes of training at the same time, to be selected as the voucher client decided ('Phase III').

Throughout the active field (voucher-issuing) phases of each of the voucher programs, BSSR maintained an on-site staff, charged with responsibility to help to resolve ambiguities in program operational procedures (developed in BSSR's Washington office); to discuss with WIN staff members their reactions to, and ability to function within, the program guidelines; and to collect data on the characteristics of voucher program and regular WIN clients and on the general setting in which the program was operating. One result of the on-site activity was that we accumulated large amounts of information on the day-to-day aspects of the implementation and operation of the voucher program, and identified a variety of situational factors which affected the shape which the program actually assumed as it went along. We also encountered a number of threats to the integrity of the research enterprise itself, and particularly to the conditions required for carrying out valid follow-up evaluations.

In order to make more than passing and anecdotal use of this information, BSSR asked Dr. Carol Greenhouse to develop a general "administrative history" of the Portland projects, with emphasis on the events and decisions which affected the development and implementation of the voucher system and on the evolution of the research on the programs. The results of that effort are the subject of this report.

Greenhouse, a social anthropologist, came to the project in January, 1976, well after the vouchered OJT program was under way in the field. Thus, the reconstruction of the history of the voucher tests required that she start from scratch to gather information from all of those, including BSSR staff, who were active participants in the attempt to establish and assess the program. She worked with minimal guidance from BSSR; project staff were interviewed for her study just as were DOL and WIN staff members at national, regional, state, and local levels.

The events (and their consequences) which are described in the report are of the sort which are usually considered the "nuisances" of program implementation and of research in real settings. It is regularly assumed in program evaluation research that bothersome events of this type will have some effect on the follow-up findings, but they are rarely treated systematically. Greenhouse has done just that: unanticipated and uncontrollable environmental events are treated directly as data, and an assessment made of their effects on what we know about the outcomes of the field tests and about vouchering in WIN in general.

This is an interesting report from several points of view. For example, the unusual opportunity to compile a history of the implementation of the voucher system gave us valuable insight on the programs, to supplement the general evaluation data collected in follow-up interviews with clients and with the schools and OJT employers who were in one way or another involved in the field tests.

There is another level on which these materials are valuable, however. The Greenhouse report raises some important questions about relations between research activities and program operations in general, and about ways in which their respective objectives may best be meshed in real settings. This is a matter of concern to those, researchers and program administrators alike, who seek to develop high-quality and useful studies of social programs and their effects upon their clienteles.

Finally, the analysis raises important questions about appropriate strategies for program evaluation research. In particular, it suggests that there are dangers in carrying out any evaluation of program effects without well-developed information on what, if any, relationship there is between the program-as-designed and the "program-as-operated." (Weiss, 1972a, 51).

These broader points are discussed in "A Comment on Some Larger Issues" which follows the body of the Greenhouse report.

THE FEASIBILITY OF FEASIBILITY TESTING: OBSERVATIONS FROM THE PORTLAND WIN VOUCHER TEST

Introduction

Far from precipitating the events that accompanied its life in Portland, the voucher project represented only a new link in a preexisting and continuing chain of personal and bureaucratic relationships. At most, its existence triggered specific events that might not have occurred otherwise, but even those reactions developed along program-related lines that were substantively unrelated to the research. As one high-level administrator said, the various parties interested in BSSR's research all accommodated to the contract (and to each other) for the sake of their own goals; however, they lived in different corners of the contract and each had his own view of the interrelationships that existed as a result of it. He drew a square for me and said, "This is the contract," and then proceeded to draw four dots, one in each corner of the square. Each dot represented an administrative unit, and the last one was the Bureau. "You see, we are all within the framework," he said, "but we all want different things from it."

His diagram appears to have been accurate. The regional office felt that in agreeing to allow the project to operate it was fulfilling its responsibility to spend money on research. Along with some strong personal biases against research ("As a taxpayer, I resent the voucher project"), a rather strong sense of administrative jealousy makes the distribution of regional monies to the states an awkward and painful process for these officials. The region is caught between bureaucratic levels: it monitors the states with the authority of the federal government, yet it is not an autonomous unit itself. Furthermore, it is such a small office (four then, and now three professionals) that there is ample opportunity for personal views to color administrative actions.

The state administrators' interest in the research had less to do with the research itself than it did with one of the by products of the establishment of the research program, i.e., money. One state official said, "We wanted the research because we wanted something for nothing." Eventually, he got what he wanted, but, as we shall see, it took three years for that to happen.

Generally, the local office--except for one man--did not have any particular interest in research, although some of the staff were interested in vouchering as a concept. Rather, the local staff's approach to the research was guided by their hope to supplement regular program funds and to find some relief from the program's limitations, caused by shortages in funding, and by more general program emphasis (especially placement). They inaccurately envisioned the voucher project as a new program that would be available to their clients, i.e., a new and less limited set of resources. It was not: vouchering was simply a new route to the same ends.

For its part, BSSR planned a quasi-experiment that, in addition to the Department of Labor's substantive purposes, had technical demands and goals of its own. BSSR expected that the regular program would continue unchanged by the presence of the research, would constitute a baseline by which the voucher project could be evaluated, and that the research itself would set up a parallel, optional method of service delivery to clients.

Ultimately, each of these goals developed an aspect of mutual exclusivity, i.e., one could not be achieved without weakening another. Thus, they came into varying degrees of conflict, and it may never be possible to untangle all the threads of accommodation and compromise that led to the end of the project three years later.

Except for BSSR, the roles and goal conflicts that became an integral part of the voucher project are endemic to the agency's continuing decision-making process. The Bureau was an accidental spectator drawn into the constant interplay among levels of a public agency. In other words, in many cases, the voucher project simply activated pre-existing conflicts (e.g., between SAU and ES, or between levels of the agency hierarchy); it did not cause them. The more particular circumstances that surrounded BSSR's presence in Portland are discussed in the following pages.

The discussion of vouchers took place in the Department of Labor, and earlier in OEO and in Congress, where the Family Assistance Plan lived and died at the end of the 91st Congress. The initial impulse for the voucher project came from the national office, which hired Leonard Goodwin, then at the Brookings Institution, to develop a concept

paper on vouchering. Goodwin was particularly interested in the links among autonomy, self-esteem and employability. In administrative terms, vouchering potentially streamlines the delivery of services by condensing the roles of decision-maker and recipient (i.e., the client decides for himself what services he needs). In his 1972 paper on introducing vouchering into manpower programs, Goodwin sums up the agency debate:

> A few officials and operating staff hypothesize that vouchers will bring no substantial change in the performance of enrollees in present programs. Others see an improvement in administrative functioning. They believe that vouchers will lead to the cutting of red tape in contracting services for enrollees, and this will improve the programs.
>
> A number of officials believe that giving trainees choices of training programs through vouchers is good in itself, furthering the general policy of decentralizing authority. There are associated hypotheses that by giving poor people increased control over decisions affecting their lives, they will have a stronger belief that their own efforts count. This belief is then supposed to lead to better performance in training and a better chance of their obtaining and holding good jobs. The governing hypotheses for the experimental project are that vouchers will improve enrollees' belief in their own abilities, their skill level, and subsequently their work-force activities as reflected in increased earnings. Subsidiary hypotheses center around the possible decrease in cost and increase in efficiency of a voucher operation.
>
> Even while these hypotheses are put forward warnings are offered by still other officials that increasing the responsibilities of poor people who have little expertise in negotiating their own training will have negative results, even worse than at present. The experimental project must test these kinds of prognostications.[1]

It is interesting to note that in Goodwin's discussion of the debate over vouchering, the discussion of practical administrative feasibility includes hypotheses based on untested attitudes concerning poor people (e.g., in paragraphs 2 and 3, quoted above). Goodwin seems to have assumed that cost arguments are not separate from behavioral arguments over what poor people will actually do with vouchers; however, they are separable, at least in theory. Administrators who approved

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[1] Leonard Goodwin, 1972. Design of an experimental study for introducing vouchers into manpower training programs. Final report submitted to Office of Research and Development, Manpower Administration, Department of Labor, page 4.

of vouchering on cost grounds might, in fact be skeptical about the ability of clients to succeed with vouchers. Thus, support of the idea of vouchering developed out of various lines of reasoning. The decision to go ahead with the project did not mean that all of the decision-makers shared uniform expectations of the research.

In fact, skepticism concerning the ability of poor people to prepare themselves for employment runs deep at all echelons of WIN's administrative staff. Counselors and job developers were less uniformly pessimistic than administrators at all levels about the possibility of clients' succeeding with vouchers. Administrators appear to expect clients to exploit WIN, to sign up for maximum training programs, to take whatever they are offered. They also expect training vendors (schools and OJT employers) to exploit the system. An irony is that these same people are in the business of providing the services they essentially blame clients for accepting, and suspect others for offering. Thus, vouchering accentuates a philosophical dissonance that exists between these officials; views and their roles vis-a-vis clients.

Again, the decision to proceed with the research did not mean that the people involved at the Department of Labor had reached an agreement on what the priorities (cost versus clients' success) or the likely result of the research would be. Rather, it simply meant that they had resolved the lengthy debate over whether or not to proceed (albeit cautiously, with strictly-defined and limited feasibility goals); they saw their role, in fact, as decision-makers, preferring to leave the other questions to the researchers. This is the earliest example of the unplanned dominance of administrative needs (i.e., ending time-consuming debate and limiting basic questions) over the substance of research needs. The question of which had the higher priority, preserving tax dollars or increasing clients' autonomy, was a crucial one, yet, as it happened, it was not resolved at the outset nor at any time during the life of the research. The voucher project was to coexist with, not replace, a program based on the traditional philosophy of giving higher priority to reduced administrative costs and quick placement and the debate between the two approaches was played out in a series of conflicts and adjustments.

At the Department of Labor, the conflict was totally abstract, yet the present of even theoretical conflict had unfortunate effects on the research (as will be discussed in the text).[2]

There was a national search for a field site; however, Portland's eventual receptivity was similar to the Department of Labor's in that it did not relate to the substance of the research. High-level local administrators met with the researchers to discuss the goals and design of the study, and were enthusiastic at the time. Further, one of the supervisors (whose contributions are discussed in the following sections) had expressed an interest in vouchering to the regional office before the Bureau arrived with its proposal. The decision to proceed in Portland was not contingent on the agreement or commitment of on-line staff; in fact, they were not aware of the early negotiations or the site search. They were fully briefed before the research was installed in Portland, and again later on procedural matters related to vouchering.

Thus, in the early days of the project, there were two crucial decisions that were made almost coincidentally to the research as BSSR saw it and had proposed it: (1) the decision to go ahead with vouchering was made without a felt need to make a concomitant commitment (on the part of virtually all administrators) to what it actually would represent in terms of administrative adjustments, and (2) the decision to accept the research in Portland was similarly superficial in terms of what was about to be attempted. This situation was complicated by the fact that the feasibility test contained some necessary ambiguity due to its broadly stated goals, and that some of the staff felt they already knew what the outcomes would be.

Funding

At the heart of the question of how the project was to be funded were (1) delay at the Congressional level and (2) a strong competitive

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[2] The national office--and certainly the administrators below the national level--had had very little experience with demonstration projects in tandem with on-going programs. In other voucher experiments, e.g., Alum Rock, vouchering replaced the traditional method of assignment students to schools. The novelty of BSSR's research situation meant that no one involved, from the top down, had had any experience that could serve as a guide in the events that ensued.

streak that ran between the various levels and components of the Department of Labor. The effects of delay appeared throughout the life of the project, when it was periodically necessary to postpone program starts because the shortage of regular WIN funds prevented the intake of new clients. An example of the workings of competition took place before Portland was chosen for the study. An earlier search had produced San Diego, California, as a viable and willing site. Although the Department of Labor originally offered to pay all costs resulting from the study (including some administrative costs and tuition), San Diego dropped out when the California Department of Human Resources refused to contibute part of the state's new allocation to the project. The project monitor had insisted on this point in order to save his own department's budget and as a matter of proper form, or "useful practice;" however, state officials had equivalent, strong loyalties, and refused.

The subsequent agreement in Portland I was that administrative costs and tuition be paid for by DOL and that social services (SAU) be underwritten by Salem. The agreement with SAU produced some later difficulties.

Phase I: Institutional Training Under Vouchers

Although higher level agency staff had had advance exposure to the voucher project before it was installed in Portland (but before research operations started), the local on-line staff did not. Its presence was announced in a memo--as one counselor said later, "like the thousands of others we get around here about new rules." The news struck different people differently, but it affected everyone, since the very concept of vouchering touched on many portions of their routine duties. Under the idealized terms of the demonstration project, counselors, job developers, and SAU workers would all be put into new relationships with clients.

The regular program responded to the new experiment that came suddenly into its midst like antibodies react to a pathogen: after a certain amount of initial confusion and adjustment, the regular program began to change the voucher project in informal (but not subtle) ways

into what was, to them, a more usable form. In the first phase of the research, this process of converting a parallel relationship into a reciprocal one was hastened by the fact that the regular program had no funds for institutional training, while the voucher program had only institutional training funds. By the time voucher operations began, regular WIN funds for institutional training had been depleted for several months. One aspect of the research design was destroyed by this situation since, instead of vouchers serving as an alternative to the regular program's resources, they now represented a route to unique resources: institutional training. This was true not only for clients, but also for staff, who now had incentive to channel clients (or particular clients) into the voucher program.

Orientation

Before the first voucher was issued, BSSR arranged for training sessions by a team of consultants to orient the counselors to counseling in a vouchering setting; BSSR trained the counselors on procedures. The researchers expected that a major change for the counselors would be in what they and the consultants called "nondirective counseling."[3] The basis for this style of counseling was self-assessment by clients, a process by which they recorded their own interests, goals and talents as they saw them, presumbly as an aid in mustering their own resources to find training or employment. Some of the counselors felt that they already had the skills the professional training team was preaching, and that they already used a nondirective approach with their clients. Furthermore, the counselors already knew each other and their counseling styles; they knew no amount of training could make all ten teams work in exactly the same way. Skepticism and self-knowledge inclined some of the staff to reject what they heard.

The job developers and SAU workers--who were not trained by the consultants--said that they should have had some orientation, since their relationships with clients would also be somewhat changed by the presence

[3] Later, BSSR was to regret having used the term "nondirective" at all, since it created some resentment among the counselors, with whose traditional style of relating to clients it was meant to contrast.

of the voucher option. They felt that they were left in the position of risking being at cross-purposes with the WIN staff. For example, SAU workers wondered to what extent they should withdraw from decision-making that was peripherally related to training, on behalf of voucher clients.

The training sessions were the first opportunity that staff had to see that the researchers' (and, by implication, the Department of Labor's) perceptions of their roles were different from reality as they saw it. The training (which did not emphasize nondirectiveness, but rather self-assessment), was aimed at a group that did not want training at all, although BSSR assumed they needed it, and ignored the groups who felt the need for orientation, but who had none. Although the sessions were designed to equalize the differences among the ten teams, in fact, they served an entirely different purpose: a tap on the wedge that already existed between WIN (and the project) and SAU.

Vouchering

The advantage to the counseling staff in cooperating with the project was that the voucher project was amply funded--unfortunately in contrast to their own program. (Although everyone involved knew that the voucher project and the regular program did not compete for funds, it was difficult to prevent the emotional reaction to what seemed like an unjust division of "the tax-payers' money.") Thus, counselors were grateful for the resources that the project offered them, although they did not fully accept its terms.

To those counselors who felt comfortable with the idea of vouchering, the project seemed like another version of their regular program roles. "It makes formal what we do informally all the time," one of the local staff said. Of course, in the minds of the researchers, it was not supposed to have been a replication of their ordinary routine. In retrospect, one interesting question becomes how it was possible that researchers, high-level agency administrators, and on-line staff could have such different perceptions of staff roles. Researchers now say that they shared a stereotype of a WIN counselor as a paternalistic, authoritarian--although well-meaing--person with Goodwin and Department of Labor officials, that their view of the real workings of the regular program was inaccurate because of this. Like many others, they assumed

a fairly close relationship between procedures and operations. The regular staff felt that the researchers expected them to be "oppressive" or "punitive" (in staff's words). Staff rebelled under that view; to them, the irony was that the BSSR's procedures were more restrictive than (unwritten) ones they normally followed. The most unacceptable aspect of the voucher project to them was that, for research purposes, some clients would have to be allowed to fail. What the research called "self-determination," the staff felt was closer to abandonment and negligence. While staff felt that the "Eastern liberals" (their term, again; in fact, BSSR's project director was raised near Portland) on the research staff had designed the project as they did because the counselors were not doing their jobs well enough, they felt that the Bureau's experimental program had the potential to penalize clients.

What looked to BSSR as the attempt to provide a test of one form of a vouchering system, looked to staff as advocacy of the system. In fact, the closer the day-to-day functioning of the voucher project came to fulfilling the goals of the counselors, the more difficult it was for the Bureau to assert itself on its own goals.

Clients' needs versus research needs.--The first voucher was issued on April 29, 1974. By the end of the first week of vouchering a number of issues were raised that were to remain with the project. Briefly stated, these were:

--counselors' fears that individual clients were not "ready" for vouchers;

--counselors' stretching search time by issuing a voucher after the search had already begun;

--counselors' offering (or not offering) vouchers, as they saw fit.

In addition to these procedural problems, other problems arose:

--fear of a law suit by clients who did not understand the voucher process and felt abandoned, or by clients who did not receive vouchers;

--SAU's feelings of alienation.

Presumably, the deviations from the procedures all were made in the interest of the clients; however, they went to the heart of the experimental design of the research. This conflict--in the eyes of counselors, a conflict of research versus clients--was to become a theme as the research progressed. Clients' choices, after all, were much less revealing once a client had been screened by his or her counselor. A test of the feasibility of a six-week search time could not take place if

counselors stretched it for clients' comfort. Success with vouchers could not be measured accurately if the clients' experience was altered by uncooperative or confusing support services delivery.

The structural needs of the research, therefore, came into conflict with what counselors saw as the clients' needs. Staff regularly adapted the regular program rules on behalf of the clients, and immediately began to do the same with the vouchering procedures. The results were that (1) the demonstration could not test what it was designed to test, and (2) in some cases, the regular and vouchered clients' experiences with the program were indistinguishable.

Agency needs versus research needs.--Although client benefit was a major concern of the counselors, they also had other, organizational imperatives which counter-balanced the project design. This was because the procedures altered (at least in theory) counselors' relationship to clients without altering their (counselors') relationship to the agency (WIN). BSSR's assumption was that counselors would not be responsible for clients' employability and placement under vouchering; however, counselors were accountable in the agency's view. This contradiction may have reflected substantive misunderstanding of vouchering on the part of state agency administrators (who, of course, had their parallel accountability to the regional and federal offices to be concerned with).[4] The contradiction produced a series of procedural modifications beyond the one mentioned earlier:

--counselors filled out Basic Training Agreements with clients to shepherd them through the process;

--counselors tried to avoid having to modify or justify post facto the Employability Development Plan filed with Salem (the state office), by encouraging clients to stay with one plan.

In terms of the research, these changes meant that it was increasingly difficult to determine when a client was acting on his own behalf and when a counselor was intervening for him.

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[4] For example, one state administrator said to me, "Except for nondirectional (sic) counseling, vouchering is great." However, what he failed to see was that counseling was an important aspect of vouchering.

The Structure of Staff Response

Counselor's response to vouchering can be seen as a bureaucratic one--they reacted to the new procedures in ways that had been structured by their prior experience with WIN. Some of the more profound instances of this pattern have just been discussed, i.e., the discomfort counselors felt with clients making decisions on their own behalf (even though counselors say that their clients very often make their own decisions under the regular program as well); and bending the vouchering procedures on behalf of the clients, just as they bent the regular procedures The regular WIN program also structured other responses, however, for example, while BSSR saw self-assessment as a process, many of the counselors saw it as another form (it is in the form of a questionnaire), simply to be completed. One counselor felt that, to clients, going through self assessment was "not worth the time, once they have their money" (i.e., their voucher). This was a common, mistaken view of the relationship of self-assessment to vouchering.

Early in the life of the project, then, one could begin to see two modes of dealing with vouchers begin to develop. The Bureau's mode was in terms of research needs: while maintaining the discreteness of the regular program, add another alongside it and measure the differences in their operation. One reason that vouchering proved so illusory in practice was that the regular program could not maintain its own boundaries with the new project adjacent to it.[5] Because the regular program staff related to vouchering in their own mode, which was in terms of their own time allocations and their need to husband scarce resources, the voucher project could not be left on the other side of the membranous agency wall; rather it was absorbed and somewhat uncomfortably digested.

The breakdown of part of the research design and goals tended to undermine the confidence of the agency staff in the project and its claims to scientific integrity. In other words, they did not feel bound by the "rules" when, from their point of view, they did not work, or tended to work against clients. This sort of frustration was not

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[5] One might well argue--as some counselors do in retrospect--that the boundaries between the regular and voucher programs were never very clear in practice.

directed at BSSR except insofar as it was the vehicle that imported the problem. Especially for counselors who felt that nondirective counseling was the same as abandonment, programmatic restrictions on what they could offer their clients became a real thorn. These restrictions--e.g., no training longer than 12 months--were no greater than in their own program; however, the expectations were higher since vouchering was new and coming from a different source. In fact, however, it often seemed that vouchering did not get at clients' real needs any more than WIN II did. Thus, the reaction of staff to BSSR's project was structured not only by what existed in the regular program, but by what did not exist, as well.

The process of absorption took place in the form of an episodic, trilateral and sometimes confusing dialogue among the counseling staff, BSSR in Portland, and in Washington. The dialogue was not wholly a verbal one, but one of actions, as well. While this process was coherent from BSSR's point of view, the sequence of memos appeared disjointed, and sometimes superfluous, to the staff. Often, memos described procedural correctives that had already been tried and discussed. They were often post facto formalizations of procedural changes that were already familiar. Since counselors saw themselves as reacting rationally and adaptively to a new situation, they did not always perceive the initial impulse of the change. In these cases, the dialogue between Portland and Washington was doubly confusing.

In general, communication between the counseling staff and the Bureau's staff was informal almost to the point of being accidental. In casual conversation, field staff discovered facts with tremendous implications for the research. For example:

- --vouchers were not being offered to people whom counselors considered ready for jobs (this response is also yet another example of the regular rules structuring the response to vouchers: the Department of Labor waived its usual procedures to allow job-ready clients to accept vouchers);
- --clients who were not new WIN registrants (to whom eligibility for vouchering was restricted) were being terminated by their counselors, assigned to a new counselor, and reregistered in the program with a new record;
- --some counselors were not offering various elements of the vouchering process, including the voucher itself, and self-assessment;

--counselors were saving their vouchers for special clients;[6]

--at least one counselor would not give a voucher to someone whose prison record she felt BSSR staff should not see.

Continuation Without Resolution

As the study continued, its boundaries, such as the one just described, became less certain. Given the range and depth of counselors' attitudes toward vouchering in practice, not to speak of their ordinary routines, it is not surprising that the ten voucher teams performed very differently. As we have seen, the teams informed their clients of the availability of vouchers in different ways with varying amounts of encouragement. The result was that ten more or less fully screened (on different bases) groups of clients found their ways to vouchers. Instead of one voucher study, there were "ten tiny studies," as one researcher said later, with client groups so distinct that they show up as statistical entities in the empirical analyses of the program (see, for example, "Occupational Choices and Vocational School Selections," by Bruce Dunning, 1976).

Briefly stated, the voucher program and the regular program did not find a particularly easy mesh, although the staff came to be fairly enthusiastic--especially about the abstract value of vouchers. The strains between operational and research objectives were usually tolerable. As one counselor said, "Institutional vouchering was successful and interesting, but not perfect." At the beginning of the research, BSSR's presence was presumed to be temporary. According to the original design of the project, the feasibility experiment was to conclude when 150 vouchers had been committed for training. Originally there was no intention of following clients through their training or into their first efforts to find jobs. The research later shifted in emphasis and became more broadly focused. As it happened, the Bureau

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[6] Initially, 150 vouchers were distributed to the ten counselors equally, each had a ration which, when depleted, could not be restored. As mentioned above, some counselors responded by saving the vouchers for people they felt would be especially successful with them. This practice was directly contrary to the research goals, since the experiment was designed to test demand on the part of clients, not counselors. When BSSR realized that rationing the vouchers was having this adverse effect, it modified the procedure and pooled the vouchers (de-rationed them), for the counselors to draw on at will until the whole supply was committed. This modification reduced the incentive to hoard the vouchers and control their flow.

was not gone from Portland at the end of the 150 vouchers, but stayed to study on-the-job training. The politeness and cooperation that were extended to the research operation when it appeared only to be a short-term event deteriorated as its presence continued, apparently indefinitely. This deterioration was also a result of other factors, as we shall see in the next sections.

Phase 2: On-the-Job Training

In August, 1974, at the Portland I debriefing, Department of Labor officials initiated discussion of a second experiment that would offer institutional training and OJT. The extension of the voucher study to on-the-job training (OJT) had not been contemplated in the original grant from DOL, but instead developed in response to conclusions that vouchering institutional training had in fact largely been administratively feasible. The local supervisor was extremely enthusiastic; the Salem officials, less so, but cooperative. During the next seven months, while the agreement was negotiated, available funds molded the research design in important ways.

First, the situation with SAU had to be resolved. SAU was asked to give estimates of its anticipated costs. In doing so, its supervisor incorporated one hundred percent client need for child care, with costs estimated at $1000 per client for all support services. These estimates were not challenged at the time; however, the actual rate of client need for child care was closer to twenty percent of the total clients. The budget sent to the Department of Labor included the SAU estimate, plus the estimates from Portland, Salem and Seattle for 300 open vouchers (i.e., a choice of institutional or on-the-job training), with a two year (instead of the one year limit from Portland I) limit to the training. The total came to over $1.3 million dollars, which exceeded available DOL funds. Research costs were cut back, the training time was put back to its original one year limit, and institutional training was removed from the program. These reductions brought the budget to an acceptable level; with research costs, the Federal outlay was approximately $900,000 dollars. During Portland II, SAU estimated its need at $200,000, overheaded at ten percent of the dollars spent, i.e., SAU could collect the overhead only on monies it had already spent, not in anticipation of expenditures. This meant that although the program had ample funding to run on, it had no additional staff to administer the funds. (ES,

on the other hand, had separate budget lines for its subsidy and its overhead, and could add new staff.) The imbalance between ample funding and short staff became chronic in SAU. The situation led to charges that the voucher project was causing an excess of work among SAU workers (although this was not a unanimous charge).

In the meantime, however, SAU funding had been drastically cut back by Congress, and regular SAU in Portland shut down completely in November, 1974. Nobody who needed child care or medical care could enter WIN during this budgetary famine; only direct-placement clients without babysitting needs and who were healthy entered the program. This situation produced the possibility that vouchering would open, once again, offering a unique resource, child care. Indeed, vouchered OJT was the only way into WIN for mothers with child-care needs, unless they were placeable; there would be no volunteers under these conditions. The ideal research situation would have been one in which the vouchers led to the identical services and funding levels as the regular program, so that the appeal of the vouchers themselves would be measured without being complicated by the allure of these other elements.

In addition, regular OJT funds dried up before vouchering could begin. One sympathetic Salem official offered a small reallocation to Portland to keep the OJT option alive for the sake of the research; however, the money arrived and was spent before vouchering could start up.

In April, 1975, SAU was partially reopened to provide for short-run child care for direct placements. The research contract came through at the same time, contributing $203,000 to a special SAU fund for services to voucher clients.

When vouchers became operational in early June, 1975, some of the problems had been solved, but others were quick to develop. SAU had been restored to part of its normal funding strength. Regular OJT funds were expected in an imminent Congressional appropriation. SAU had been awarded a special fund to facilitate the provision of services to vouchered clients. The research design had been modified to accommodate to budget constraints. The new problems were that within a month of the start-up of Portland II, OJT funds had not yet arrived, and regular SAU once again shut down. The voucher project was once again in the position of offering a unique (not simply a parallel) option: just as

clients had had to accept vouchers to obtain institutional training during the first phase, clients who needed social services during the early parts of the OJT phase had to come through the voucher process to have access to it.

Through informal communication networks, the BSSR field staff learned of one source of the delay in regular OJT funding: the money has been pooled to the rest of the state, leaving vouchers the only route by which clients could have access to OJT in Portland. This decision had been made in Salem in order to protect Portland from the consequences of a double allocation (i.e., money competing for consumers); an excess of regular funds at the end of the year would have repercussions during the next fiscal year. Also, administrators presumed that Portland's labor market could not absorb a doubled number of OJT contracts. The research implications had not been considered; however, the same man who obtained ten thousand dollars for an OJT tranfusion earlier in the spring now promised to restore regular operations funds to Portland to insure a full comparison. He eventually did so, but by the time the reallocation arrived, weeks had gone by without a regular program to balance against the use of vouchers.

Regular SAU shut down for the second time on June 30, again reflecting budgetary uncertainty that prevented it from repaying the previous year's deficit. This problem as well as the shortage of OJT funds had stemmed from delays in Congress over HEW-DOL appropriations in FY 1976. In a policy of caution, the region kept a wary eye on any expenditures made in anticipation of the new year's budget. This situation continued over the entire life of Portland II: both the researchers and the agency's administrators were paralyzed by it.

There were some other important aspects in the OJT phase's background. First, OJT involved job developers to a much greater extent than institutional training had. Committing an OJT voucher involved being hired for a job, and was treated in program reporting statistics as a placement. Second, for the job developers especially, OJT involved heavily-laden responsibilities. Their regular roles involved personal relationships with groups of employers with whom they had a two-way unstated arrangement: the job developer would provide a well-qualified and reliable client, and the employer would agree to

sign his contract. To fulfill their side of the bargain, job developers felt justified in screening their clients for the most likely candidates for successful hires before sponsoring them. Under the vouchering procedures, staff were expected to facilitate the completion of the contract (but not negotiate it) without prior screening. From the researchers' point of view, this was the equivalent of the staff role during the earlier phase. To the job developers, however, it meant standing behind an unknown client and risking the working relationships that they had worked hard to develop with employers. Thus, from the beginning of the OJT phase, there was strong inducement for job developers to intervene in the commitment process.

Third, as there had been during institutional training under vouchers, there were placement pressures coming from WIN that worked against the idealized freedom that the vouchers promised. In the case of OJT, pressures were much more severe, since under the Social Security Act, one-third of all WIN expenditures must be for OJT or PSE. Agency pressure constituted a second major force that placed job developers' professional self-preservation at some disparity with the research goals.[7] This is an example of how BSSR's temporary and tandem position in Portland led to less cooperation than there might have been under other circumstances, e.g., as a permanent operation. Job developers were not likely to jeopardize their own career development and that of their clients for the sake of the visiting researchers.

In addition, apart from the structural difficulties of synchronizing the two programs, OJT was especially badly timed because of the economy. Unemployment was at record highs across the nation and placements--and not only for WIN clients--were extremely difficult. Later, some administrators blamed the voucher project for the decline in placements during this period; however, staff did not appear to make that charge.

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[7] The National WIN office offered to arrange a temporary status for Portland that would have relieved the program of placement pressures by carrying over the previous years placement figures for one more fiscal year. This would have assured WIN of meeting its placement goals and simultaneously would have removed incentives for job developers to unilaterally modify vouchering procedures for this administrative purpose. The local office supervisor, however, refused this offer, probably out of pride, but also out of the conviction that vouchering could "work." Thus, staff and researchers were left in a situation in which each saw their own goals threatened by the other's procedural or administrative needs.

Once vouchering was under way in early July, 1975, a pattern of adjustment, similar to that described for Phase I, began to unfurl, complicated by the tensions just discussed. Of course, with no regular program child care, accurate assessment of client demand for vouchers (as opposed to the services attached to them) was made extremely difficult. Another early event was the accidental discovery that Portland's regular OJT funds had been reallocated to the rest of the state at about the same time vouchering was starting. An administrator had promised BSSR that during this phase of the research, he would guarantee that a full comparison of the programs would be possible, and he fulfilled that promise by reassigning funds to Portland, thus solving the problem. This story is interesting for two reasons: (1) it illustrates the tension between higher-level administrative needs (i.e., budget) and research needs; and (2) when counselors refer to this episode in retrospect, they do not add that the problem was resolved. Instead, it remains for them yet another of the blows that they consider the voucher project to have dealt them and their clients.

Start-Up

The SAU shut-down and the confusion over regular program funds both occurred around the time that vouchering began for Portland II. In this sensitive climate, job developers began their work, somewhat caught between the voucher project and their agency. Salem was known to be sensitive to employer exploitation of voucher clients; an excessively long proposed training time on an OJT contract could cause a delay of weeks before the client would be cleared to start the OJT. (Clearance required communications between Portland and Salem, Salem and Seattle, and back.) Field staff began to report some undercoding of occupations in order to expedite the processing of clients' papers by reducing the length of training.[8]

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[8] Coding refers to the Occupational Rating System (ORS), which lists occupations and the maximum length of training permitted. Vouchered OJT was originally designed with a blanket limit of 52 weeks of training; however, when the first few contracts were all written for 52 weeks (including two for produce stackers), a "maximum" permissible time formula was devised, based on training times derived from the Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT). The actual formula was DOT + 8 weeks.

Most of the events that disrupted Portland II were not of the sort that occured throughout Portland I, internal structural adjustments to the new entity (vouchering). Rather, OJT was affected more by external political and administrative events. These, too, had an effect on the local staffs and their clients; further, staff began to perceive that BSSR was not an autonomous agent in Portland, but was--like the staff--subject to being buffeted by outside forces. One of the earliest of these events once vouchering had started was the decision to enforce an existing ruling that prevented applicant AFDC fathers with pending UI claims from registering with WIN. In terms of research, this provision introduced an element of noncomparability with earlier male, non-vouchered OJT clients. The rule also appeared to exclude from the potential vouchered population the men who were among those most likely to succeed at OJT, i.e., those men with fairly recent work experience and with the desire to secure additional training.

Other events had to do primarily with money and staffing, and the awkward balance between them. Congressional appropriations for Fiscal Year 1976 were badly delayed, and uncertainty over the appropriations for WIN made administrators very cautious about releasing funds for any purpose. SAU was not in a position to recruit new staff, but also could not pay for child care unless it was at a certified center or home (following a national requirement). Under these conditions local SAU would not provide child care for vouchered clients, despite the availability of separate funds for these clients. As an accommodation, the local WIN supervisor offered to the local SAU supervisor to control enrollment of clients with child care needs in the regular WIN program; much later, setting limits was discovered to be illegal. For months, SAU and the local WIN supervisor juggled staffing possibilities so that the voucher operation would have enough manpower; however, this situation was never resolved, except temporarily.

In the crunch caused by the downward spiral of declining placements, precarious funding, a poor economy and agency pressure for placements, the local staff became increasingly sensitive to the presence of vouchering in their midst. In retrospect, they now say (and apparently said then) that the local prime mover behind vouchering

was responsible for giving it priority over the regular program. Although he was well-loved by his staff, more than one person referred to his having "sacrificed" the regular program for the sake of the study. It is difficult now to reconstruct what form the so-called sacrifice took: most staff seem to feel that he had withheld the psychological support that they felt was necessary for their own successful job performance, that his attention had been diverted. Most of the regular teams place a great deal of importance on the pressures to which they are subject, in a positive sense: they speak of inter-team competition and the promise of rewards for high placements as being real incentives for successful work. These same people seemed inclined to feel abandoned when their supervisor showed interest in what appeared to be a "rival" program.

A Final Crisis

In the late fall of 1975, toward the final weeks of OJT, two developments occurred that brought voucher project relations with the regular program to a head. First, the ten-team approach to vouchering finally appeared to be at cross-purposes with the research. Of course, this idea had been discussed since the beginning of institutional vouchering, when the ten teams handled the program option so differently from each other. Under the intensified pressures described for OJT, there was severe deterioration of any semblance of uniformity, and noncooperation clearly affected the research. One specialized team replaced the vouchering functions of the ten Janus-like teams (one face toward traditional service delivery, one face toward vouchered delivery). This move was demanded by some of the teams, but for others, the creation of one team only emphasized what was to them the elite nature of the voucher project. The new voucher team had its own funds, its own room, and specialized roles. One supervisor looks back on the change as a healthy one that insured his office's cooperation; another supervisor says that the change damaged the democratic structure of local WIN and that his staff's morale suffered as a result. One staff member said that the creation of the special team meant that vouchering had become an effective escape from overwork, since clients who chose

a voucher were removed from the regular teams' caseloads. In any case, the move from ten teams to one resolved some of the research dilemmas but certainly created others, due to the fact that staff did not react uniformly to either the problem or its solution.

In the case of the move to one voucher team, administrative and research goals again came into conflict. The research goals were clear--ten teams with varying degrees of cooperation and comprehension were not a satisfactory base for assessing the feasibility of vouchering; however, the staff was not told why the consolidation was taking place. From the administrative point of view, the move to a new team translated into the ability to hire more staff, as long as the special fund remained. Local WIN and SAU supervisors were asked about their staffing needs; SAU replied that five to nine new people would be needed to help with the additional work caused by the voucher project. In the end, two people were found, but red tape and unpredictable events (a pregnancy and resignation from one and an injury and disability in the other) prevented the transition from being an easy or quick one.

In the meantime, the other development that tore at the relationship between the research and staff was the sudden illness and death in late November, 1975, of the supervisor who had stood behind the voucher project. Some angry staff blamed his heart attack on the stresses caused by the research. The cohesiveness in the operation of both the project and the regular program that had been an effect of his personality and popularity fell into disarray as soon as he died. The supervisory staff was reorganized following his death, and his replacement's inclination (and wish) was to turn his back on vouchering and restore order to his agonized staff. This angry mood filtered upwards through the levels of the agency; ironically, the staff now seems less angry than the administrators who claim to speak for them.

Also ironically, the voucher project was caught with a surplus of funds toward the end of Portland II. Researchers had realized this possibility during the summer, when they discovered that SAU's estimates of its needs had been too high. Furthermore, there was an excess of unobligated funds due to a low commitment rate from ES, as well.

Various plans came under discussion for the disposition of these funds. There was some discussion of starting new projects in Eugene and/or Salem, but these were rejected either by BSSR or at the state level. The question of what to do with the surplus was not resolved until after the WIN supervisor's death.

Phase 3: Open Vouchering

Simultaneously with what appeared to be a brutal end to vouchering in Portland, negotiations over one more phase were initiated by the state administrator who had been so supportive during Portland II's financial difficulties. He proposed what was to become open vouchering, i.e., clients choosing not only between the regular program and vouchering, but between institutional training and OJT. Phase 3 would be the first full comparison.[9]

The winter of 1975-1976 was spent developing the local, state and national administrative arrangements for the new study.[10] The initial difficulty was in securing the cooperation of SAU. The relationship between WIN and SAU had deteriorated badly at every administrative level, and SAU was at first unwilling to proceed with another phase of the project. The Regional office said that it would not forward its proposal to Washington unless SAU's anxieties were relieved.

Once again, calls went out to solicit estimates of needs for what was to become the short-lived Portland III. This time, state SAU registered its protest by slowing down its response. The region finally forwarded the proposal to Washington early in January, 1976. The next six months were a series of delays; every communication had to filter up and down the system before progress could be made.

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[9] Today, it is uncertain whether staff knew (or remember) that the three phases were not planned from the beginning of the research, but were rather unanticipated outgrowths. Thus, staff sees BSSR's relations with administrators in a somewhat more strategic light than is actually correct.

[10] Voucher funds were transmitted via two contracts, Each change (I → II; II → III) required time-consuming negotiations among these various levels of the WIN program.

When the contract came through, the allotment for SAU was high relative to past expenditures; however, the supervisor was still unable to hire staff to administer the office's funds. The quota that emerged for the first time in the letter of agreement (discussed below) prevented the surplus from being used for vouchers.

In late May, Portland III was ready to start, but once again, it was severely altered by external events. This time, they came unexpectedly from the Department of Labor--previously considered an ally of the research by the local and regional staffs. Contrary to what had been agreed upon during the negotiations over the grant modification, the letter of agreement between the Office of Research and Development (ORD) and Region X in Seattle specified a 50%-50% division between institutional training and OJT.[11] (This percentage parity was later translated into a raw number quota of 45/45, since Salem estimated that ninety contracts could be drawn from the remaining research funds.) The establishment of this quota was important in understanding the last weeks of the research for two reasons. First, it was a surprise to BSSR, and publicly known to be. The imagined alliance of the researchers with the national office had been an important factor in structuring people's reactions to the project. Now that that alliance had been made ambiguous, the research took on a new face, apparently--judging from the rate of cooperation with Portland III--a less important face. Second, the quota affected the research, in that it reinforced the tendency that developed among staff during Portland I (under the ration system) and Portland II (with high placement pressures) to screen heavily. Under the quota system, it was doubtful that client demand for OJT versus institutional training could be ascertained at all, and, even if it could, it was even more doubtful that the demand for vouchered institutional training could be satisfied.

A secondary result, although one that perhaps had the greatest impact on the research, was that the field staff was put in the position

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[11] The reason for the quota was that a quota <u>had</u> been agreed upon for similar research that was beginning in Baltimore; the national office simply followed the same model for both sites, although there was no necessity for the research conditions to be the same in both places.

of having made false promises to the counselors and job developers. One incident made this a serious situation: one office had been stockpiling clients in anticipation of more vouchers and, when other offices protested, field staff thought they were honestly reassuring them that there would be plenty of vouchers to go around. Not only were there, in fact, very few vouchers, but since the more popular institutional vouchers were likely to be used up quickly, order of arrival at the voucher office was also a crucial factor in clients' "stand-by" status.

The staff was outraged, not at the Bureau--since now it was apparent what BSSR, too, was a victim of sorts--but at their own bureaucracy. Their response, in spite of field staff's efforts to cajole, was to boycott the voucher project. They felt that the vouchers were too unreliable a commodity for them to recommend to their clients since already they had sent clients interested in school training to an orientation, only to find that institutional vouchers were no longer available. They were angry on their own behalf, and on that of clients. Ironically, Portland III existed at all partly because staff semi-cooperation had had the effect of slowing down the vouchering process in Portland II; now noncooperation was virtually complete, with many counselors not informing clients of the voucher option, and voucher registration down to a trickle.

The Final Situation

Given the field situation, it is difficult to assess the effect of the voucher team itself on the research. Although they were housed in the same building as regular WIN staff who have their own supervisor, the voucher team was not under the direct authority of that supervisor, but of the next higher-ranking person, whose office was several miles away. They were thus segregated administratively and physically within the building, since they had their own large room in the basement, while the other staff shared rather small offices on the first floor. The BSSR staff was also in the basement, although at the other end of the building. The effect was a considerable degree of physical and managerial autonomy for the voucher team, and, in the minds of the regular WIN staff, there was a natural (but inaccurate) association

of the voucher team with BSSR.[12] Generously, it can be said that the team exploited its independence to a degree that should be considered a factor in the experience of clients with the last phase of the project. They were absent from their desks for large portions of the day, leaving clients neglected for long periods. When they were present, the atmosphere in their office was one of clowning and disrespect.[13] Playing games and lounging at their desks in the voucher team office were not interrupted even when the supervisor was present. It is possible to interpret the lack of management of the voucher team as a display of cynicism--or even hostility--on the part of their supervisor. He stated that he expected the voucher project to "fail" (his word), and apparently made little effort even to maintain its integrity.

Portland III ended far short of its goals; in fact, without ever having truly begun to operate. Given the quota, the opportunity for open vouchering never really existed because of the stockpiling described above; even if that had not occurred, a real choice among training routes would have survived only about one week before the institutional quota began to eliminate an option. Oregon has been able to keep the money that would have been used for vouchers, and allocate it as it wishes.

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[12] The Bureau's staff did not oversee or direct the voucher team; the latter were WIN employees.

[13] For example, on one day when I was present, the clerk/receptionist wore Mickey Mouse ears while greeting clients. The office walls were decorated with posters and cartoons of, at best, locker room quality. Although as individuals face-to-face with clients, members of the team acted with some dignity and seriousness, they did seem to have lost their sense of what the carnival atmosphere in the room did to the credibility of their effort.

CONCL ION

This report is hindsight. uld not be read with the preface, "If only we had known. . .", because not possible to say with any certainty which specific events would been different (and in what way) under different circumstances, admini rative and otherwise. On the other hand, it is equally clear that some events were produced by the structure of the situation, whereas others were products of individual personalities and idiosyncracies as well as unpredictable external events. In this chapter, we turn to the former, that is, to the kinds of events produced by the very organization of the relationships created by the research from its genesis to its reporting. Treating these events as variables raises some questions that go well beyond the history of this one project; they are questions that go to the heart of evaluation research. In this chapter, we will begin with some structural generalizations from the Portland experience, and proceed to broader research issues.

Staff Support

Throughout Portland I and II, a major variable was the level and nature of staff cooperation. As the chronology of events shows, the voucher project was accepted in Portland without the prior knowledge or consent of the on-line staff. Their own supervisor and the administrative hierarchy above him were fully briefed, and the prospect of additional dollars and job slots elicited some enthusiasm. In retrospect, some staff members now point to their lack of participation in the final stage of the site search as an indication of the disregard with which they claim to have been treated by the researchers. On the other hand, the same individuals remember that when they eventually did receive memos detailing the procedural adjustments the research would involve, their reaction was matter-of-fact, since the voucher project memos were like the "thousands of other memos we get around here all the time." The consent issue was, perhaps, a convenient peg for expressing the deeper frustrations that this report discusses. Thus, even in retrospect, it is difficult to assert that prior consent of the staff would have eased any of the angry feelings that developed later.

In general, though, the episode raises the larger question of whether or not staff should have what effectively is veto power over installation of a research project in a particular site--so that their own consent can be involved to insure cooperation during the life of the research. In other words, if prior consent would create a setting in which staff felt responsible for the health of the research themselves, should evaluation researchers "recruit" staff participants? In practice, such overt solicitation of staff support has distinct disadvantages. First, in the WIN context (for example), counselors and job developers are not trained in social science research methods. They should not be expected to appreciate--let alone approve of--research goals and design. Feasibility research in particular (and by definition) entails a risk of program failure--an aspect that regular program staff understandably find discomfiting. The research in Portland placed new demands on local WIN staff; their resistance to these demands was a healthy sign that they were continuing to act in their role as WIN counselors--not para-researchers. Had the staff been eager for the voucher project, it would have suggested that their own procedures were more flexible or less regulatory than researchers thought, and/or that they were willing to step out of their roles. Yet, those roles and the responses of staff in those roles were among the research interests in Portland. In general, on-line staff might well be made curious or intellectually interested by innovations proposed in a study design, but given the nature of their roles and their informal procedural sub-systems (such as the ones discussed in the preceeding chapters), the expectation should perhaps be one of resistance and conflict rather than total cooperation.

Goal Conflict and Indifference

The type of conflict that researchers experienced was not always verbal or argumentative, but structural. In Portland, for example, job developers who believed that clients do not know how to choose employers felt that the project's goal of maximum client autonomy compromised WIN's goal of maximum placements. Researchers were unable to reduce this conflict since they had no power to add meaningful rewards (promotions or raises) or remove penalties (for low placements) that staff feared.

Since the research itself was carried out through a subcontract to the state of Oregon, the state was the logical administrative unit to offer rewards to participants who made the research especially successful. For their part, though, Oregon officials were not interested in allocating their scarce resources in the form of bonuses for a project to which they were largely indifferent.

State officials are not required to specify their level of commitment to a federally sponsored research project before it is installed in their area. In fact, research may not fit particularly well into their agendas, except coincidentally, as when an extra budget or job slots are involved. Lower level staff are caught in a triangle between their indifferent state supervisors and the federal government, who they see as being represented by the researchers. To some extent, state and regional administrators feel the same bind: caught between "orders" from Washington and their responsibilities to the other administrative unit.

In the case of job developers in particular, the fear of penalties was probably a stronger force against cooperation with the project than lack of incentives to do so. Their only access to rewards (both personal and collective) was through high placement levels. The local supervisor rejected an offer from the national office to hold developers harmless on placements (or lack of placements) made during the life of the voucher project. At least one Department of Labor official believes that they were actually being held harmless anyway. In any case, the matter was out of the hands of researchers. Furthermore, the fact that researchers did not seem to feel that client autonomy would necessarily result in a lower placement level only reinforced staff belief that they did not sympathize with--or even understand--the problems the local office faced because of the research.

Responses to Conflict: Communication

Throughout the life of the voucher project, conflict itself was less destructive than the responses to it. For example, during Portland I, the fact that staff were hoarding vouchers to distribute to what they considered to be the most promising clients (see footnote, page 13) had a ready solution (de-rationing the vouchers), and was in and of itself a datum on feasibility; however, at the time, the event had serious overtones of rebellion on the one hand and feelings of betrayal on the

other. Part of the crisis mood any time research operations were disrupted in this way stemmed from the fact that both staff and researchers did not have easy access to remedies. Action required authorization, and authorization required communication, which was slow and cumbersome.

The lack of quick channels of communication between the research site and the National Office was, perhaps, a second major variable in the history of the voucher project. Researchers were restricted officially to communication through the same channels as other WIN operations, i.e., through the local office to the state, then to the region, and finally to the national office. From its end, the national office could not communicate directly with the local office either; rather, those administrators, too, sent recommendations and directives back to the site through the region and the state. Inserting seven steps between question and response was frustrating to all participants. It also caused concrete problems. First, it involved middle-level (state and regional) officials in the problems of research to a greater degree than they thought acceptable. Second, it encouraged ad hoc problem-solving at the local level by researchers and staff themselves. Finally, it also encouraged violations of the channels of communication: direct telephone calls sometimes replaced properly routed memoranda. This could only exacerbate feelings of tension in those administrators who were passed over, since it emphasized their lack of control over the research process. Part of this problem might be solved in the future by creating special lines of communication for research-related matters; these lines might not necessarily follow the route for regular program communications.

Research Needs vs. Service Delivery Needs

The fact that vouchering took place in a dichotomous setting compounded the effects of the staff's inability to adjust (at all levels, but particularly at the lowest level) and the difficulties of communication. On-line staff were being asked not only to change their roles but also, in effect, to perform two roles at once: researchers expected them to be able to do their regular WIN jobs as if the research did not exist, and then to voucher, as if their regular jobs did not exist. In retrospect, the point should be not that this expectation was excessively

high, but that researchers and staff alike had no means available for dealing with the necessary conflict that existed between the two roles.

The necessarily uneasy fit between research and its setting suggests that program autonomy should not be a test of success or a goal for demonstration projects such as the voucher project. As the history of the voucher project reveals at any number of points, research entails special constraints--mostly in the form of human relations--that regular operations do not. Thus, "ease of fit" is not in and of itself a test of feasibility because under "real" conditions, the context for fit would be entirely different. For example, even counselors who did not find vouchers themselves objectionable or difficult to deal with, complained of the effect the project had on their ordinary routine. These peripheral problems would not have existed had vouchers been the only method of operation in that office. Furthermore, the middle level (state and regional) administrators did not feel that the research was a priority of theirs; they are especially uncomfortable with research and its problems, as has already been described.

Instead of maintaining program autonomy as the goal, perhaps research autonomy--as defined by the authority to maintain a stable (not a "pure") operation--should be. Although researchers would risk incurring massive noncooperation among staff at all levels (might in fact, be unable to locate a site), they would gain an ability to track the implementation process, so that there would be something concrete to evaluate at the end of the experience. The voucher project took a position somewhere between these two extremes (project vs. program autonomy), in that it yielded to the priorities of regular operations selectively.

This question of just who should be in control of research is really a question of whether research is just another form of service delivery or whether it is something different. In the history of the voucher project, service delivery was an outcome of the research, not its primary goal. In other words, the procedures made an effort to protect clients from the effects of vouchers, should they prove unacceptable to the training community, for example, but the researchers did not see themselves as being in the "voucher business." In fact, counselors sometimes accused researchers of "letting clients fail" with vouchers; such statements were indications of the divergence between operations

goals and research goals. The jurisdiction of administrators over both regular operations and research in the field helps maintain the illusion that researchers should be offering some kind of program, or that they do it badly. Special lines of communication and authority-as suggested earlier, would make researchers' special functions and needs more difficult to forget in daily practice. Some administrators believe that evaluation research should not be under the control of the relevant agency at all, that researchers would have more freedom if all research were funded directly by Congress or by GAO. This sort of third-party research would relieve researchers and, in this case, counselors and job developers alike of some of the triangular relationships they found burdensome, although it would undoubtedly create some equally complex working relationships among agencies.

Implementation and Evaluation

The variables discussed in this paper should not be construed as signs of failure of the experiment or of the researchers (or, from the other side, of the staff-participants). It should not be necessary for the relationship of research to regular operations to be one of competition; the goals of each enterprise are, in fact, substantially different and divergent. While the goal of operations is, perhaps, uni-dimensional enough to fit comfortably within criteria of success that are purely in dollar teams, research goals are not. As we have seen, in the course of installing a research operation in place, success can be measured in effective working relationships long before other sorts of costs and benefits emerge. A research dollar simply does not buy the same sort of service that an operational dollar does; while this outward fact is well recognized, the other factors implied in the distinction are often not recognized or acted upon, as we have seen.

The relationship of the research and the researchers to their administrative environment, both in the West (Portland, Salem and Seattle) and in Washington, D.C., was the sum of its parts. Almost no changes could be made in any one spot without affecting the entire enterprise; corrective measures sometimes seemed to produce new problems. In this aspect, the voucher project was not unusual. The consequences

were not the destruction of the project, or its failure; in fact, there was a feasibility test and vouchering did take place under some conditions. Rather, the effect of research/administrative interaction was to obsure the lines between cause and effect, and to contribute a large dose of ambiguity to the tasks of obtaining and interpreting results.

SUMMARY

The Voucher Project unfurled in three phases, each one unplanned at the inception of its predecessor. The underlying interest throughout was to test the feasibility of vouchers as a means for clients to purchase training requisite to employment. In practice, vouchers were not only "blank checks"--with limits set by the researchers and the state and federal administrators; they were intended to be used on the basis of clients' decisions. The presumption was that traditional service delivery in the area of employment-related training was dominated by counseling staff. Thus, at the beginning of the research, vouchers represented not only a flexible, though limited, amount of dollars, but were thought to involve an innovative decision-making method, as well. Early in the life of the project, it became clear that the line between vouchering as a process and traditional decision-making methods was not as clear as researchers and federal officials had presumed. Counselors did not perceive themselves as dominating the decision-making process, but only guiding it for the protection of clients, and they were reluctant to give up what they saw as a necessary and beneficial role. They saw vouchering in terms of new source of dollars, not a new delivery system. Local and state administrators also tended to see the project less in terms of research than in terms of resources. Thus, the pattern of cooperation and accommodation that developed during the life of the project had a large element of coincidence to it, although some staff at all levels showed interest and good will in at least an abstract way.

The process of funding the voucher project through its phase of institutional training, on-the-job training (OJT), and finally a brief open vouchering phase, meant far more than juggling members on tally sheets. Funding was an important, structuring factor in the relationships between the agencies (SAU and ES) and between the agencies and the research, since funding determined their ability to cooperate substantively with research needs. As we have seen, local administrators were not autonomous in this regard, but were subject to Congress

and the national offices of the Departments of Labor and HEW. Further, funding decisions involved making prior assumptions about the behavior of clients, vendors and employers. Would clients take vouchers at their maximum value? Would schools or employers exploit the time and dollar limits? Disagreement over these questions translated into debate over exactly what a dollar would purchase when it was in the hands of a client with a voucher. Finally, in the case of Portland II (OJT) and Portland III (open vouchering), the problems due to funding altered and intensified the relationship of the researchers to the Department of Labor, since questions of allocation and timing were not matters that BSSR could resolve on its own. As we have already seen in the earlier discussion in this paper, the wedge that appeared between the researchers' and the agency's view of each other's proper function had a serious effect on the morale of the project as a whole; Salem and the Region were caught in the middle, and counselors became increasingly skeptical about the integrity of the voucher program.

The victim of this relationship was the research: DOL was sometimes an ally of, and sometimes a detractor from, its own objectives. While this ambiguous role produced difficulties for everyone involved in the project, it was doubly difficult for the program staff in Portland, since they felt the repercussions of flux without having access to complete information about its sources. The staff's solution as we have seen, was to take control by turning its collective back on the research.

A COMMENT ON SOME LARGER ISSUES

Ann Richardson

The events described above have significance beyond their impact on a single project. People experienced in demonstration or evaluation research will recognize them, at least in form, as common problems associated with research in real settings. Administrators, too, will find similarities with other only-partially-successful attempts to implement programs or program innovations.

The evaluation literature contains many examples of "the perennial frictions that beset applied research," (Weiss, 1973, p. 53) and their consequences. Weiss has published useful summaries of what the experience of others in the past suggests are six general sources of problems deriving from the fact that research and practice are being carried out in the same real setting. One source of friction is that the modal personality types of practitioners and research people differ (or are believed to differ).

> The researcher is likely to be a detached individual interested in ideas and abstractions. He thinks in terms of generalization and analytical categories. . . . The practitioner, on the other hand, is likely to be a warm, outgoing personality, now, ... committed to action. He finds the researcher's skepticism uncongenial, and he finds it difficult to warm up to him as a human being. (Weiss, 1972, p. 99.)

Further, the role content of the two kinds of position is often inconsistent.

> Basically, a practitioner has to believe in what he is doing; a researcher has to question it. This difference in perspective creates inevitable tensions. Whatever their initial personal or value characteristics, once they go about the divergent tasks, they are almost bound to see things differently. (Weiss, 1972, p. 99.)

Along with such differences in general role content, it is often the case that the respective roles of the research and operations personnel are not clearly defined.

> Evaluation often requires practitioners to take on new roles. The new roles may not be clearly defined in advance and become apparent only after a series of disputes with the evaluators. . . Particularly frustrating are uncertainties about the authority structure; it is often unclear who has authority to resolve the differences that arise. (Weiss, 1972, p. 100.)

Fourth, the goals, values and interests of the parties to the enterprise are often widely divergent.

> The practitioner is concerned with service. He sees evaluation as a diversion and possibly even a threat. (Weiss, 1972, p. 100.)

> [Because there is a tendency for program staffs to see the evaluation effort as a potential threat to the program itself,] the effects on the study range from the annoying to the disastrous. [Staff at all levels]can refuse access to information and to people; they can refuse to allow control groups to subvert them; their record-keeping may be incomplete and faulty; they may manipulate the data . . . .(Weiss, 1973b, p. 180.)

> [It often appears] that the relative autonomy given to evaluators. . . to pursue their research was motivated less by respect for the integrity of research than by unsophistication about the possible effects of evaluation. . . . As this . . . becomes better understood, there may be more interference with the planning and conduct of evaluation research. (Weiss, 1973a, p. 51.)

At a slightly different level of analysis, problems are often created by tendencies for programs to accommodate to their surroundings, and to change in the process. Although for research purposes we require a relatively stable object of study, it very often is an inaccessible goal in real settings.

> The program should remain stable and well-defined, so that it is clear what stimuli brought about the observed outcomes. But many of the programs [about which Weiss interviewed research staffs] shifted, lurched about, and sought new directions. In these cases, before-after outcome data are difficult to interpret, because the definition of "the program" associated with given outcomes is not clear. (Weiss, 1973a, p. 51.)

Finally, certain characteristics of the institutional setting of the research can lead to less comfortable accommodation between research and administrative staffs.

> When an agency has a history of internal conflict, evaluation may be viewed with particular suspicion. Staff are apt to see the evaluators as management hatchet men. . . . Other aspects of the institutional setting have consequences as well. Evaluator-practitioner relationships are affected by such aspects of the agency as the administrative structure, . . . supervisory practices, openness of communication channels, and the state of relationships with cooperating agencies who refer participants, receive referrals, or offer complementary services. Where ambiguity and fragmented authority flourish the evaluation is apt to suffer the strains of misperception, conflicting goals, and inadequate support. (Weiss, 1972, p. 101.)

Greenhouse's materials offer examples of each of these sources of strain. While it would be inappropriate to comment in detail on the personality structures of the individuals involved at all levels of the Portland project, it was certainly the case that the research staff were inclined to think "in terms of generalization and analytical categories," and that we eventually became characterized as "Eastern liberals." And, too, an immediate action orientation, and protective concern about the welfare of clients who might be involved in the voucher program, was characteristic of many of the operating staff there.

Differences in role content often resulted in evaluation-practice conflict. BSSR's position of "let's try the system and see what happens," clearly dictated by the feasibility task, was often acutely discomfiting to the WIN staff, who found it difficult to think about "trying" vouchering without trying to make it work one way or another. At a much later stage, when the nature of the BSSR national office relationship became ambiguous, the situation was even more distressful; in the eyes of many, we had lost most of any legitimacy we ever possessed.

Further, there was often a lack of clear differentiation of roles in the program, though we had tried to make differences as large as possible by having no direct involvement in the actual administration of the voucher program. However, the fact that the WIN staff often had to resort to BSSR staff's interpretation of the operating procedures (rather than, say, higher-level WIN staff) was just one instance of the blurring of the respective responsibilities of the two groups.

The divergence of BSSR and local WIN interests was evident at a number of points: in uncertainty about whether (and when) research objectives should prevail over, or give way to, operating demands; in the persistence with which some WIN staff selected the clients whom they thought would do best in the voucher program; in the delaying effects of the exhaustion or freezing of regular program operating funds; and the necessity for research purposes that the voucher program be allowed to fail if it in fact was not a feasible one, for the WIN program, a necessity which struck the WIN staff as irresponsible (or worse).

The institutional setting of the voucher effort, too, had its effect. Certainly, the regular WIN program had been buffeted by repeated and frequent changes in operating procedures and objectives well before BSSR arrived there. The change from WIN I to WIN II, with its substantially greater emphasis on placement than on training, was especially troublesome to some staff (but by no means all). And the problems which

developed later in trying to articulate the participation of the SAU were simply new manifestations of old problems in coordination. Perhaps, however, the best summary of the institutional setting into which the voucher program was placed is that cited by Greenhouse: the presence of the project 'was announced in a memo--as one counselor said later, 'like the thousands of others we get around here about new rules.'"

Some of the Suggested Remedies

The question is, of course, how those who carry out (and, for that matter, those who sponsor) evaluation research can best cope with these several kinds of threats to the validity of their work. Again, Weiss has summarized much of what is known about "what to do," although she cautions that:

> Very little empirical research has been done on arrangements and methods that lessen tension in applied research projects. We therefore have to depend for guidance on the "received wisdom," the generally accepted lessons of experience. (Weiss, 1972, p. 104.)

Assent to housing the research effort is important: "It is essential to involve project administrators and managers in planning an evaluation." (Weiss, 1972, p. 104.) More specifically, Weiss argues that it is to the advantage of all parties to involve practitioners in the evaluation.

> They gain understanding of what evaluation is all about. . . . This knowledge dispels some of the sense of threat. . . and some of the suspicion generated by the presence of alien characters asking questions. . . . They have information and ideas to contribute. . . . Further, they are more likely to be cooperative about new procedures. . . when they see the sense of the requests. (Weiss, 1972, p. 105.)

Like all general recommendations, however, this one has its shortcomings. Weiss quotes a member of a research staff attempting to evaluate a community health program:

> [The staff] resisted filling out records. We couldn't devise a reward system to motivate them. . . . They were involved in developing the record system from the very beginning, so it's not a matter of the system being imposed. (Weiss, 1973a, p. 52.)

Greenhouse also has some pertinent reservations about this recommendation

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As another threat-reducing strategy, Weiss suggests emphasis on the "theoretical" nature of the research, its focus on more general issues.

> Almost every evaluation is out to discover more than whether this particular program works in this particular time and place with this staff and these participants. . . . There is some kind of theory implicit in almost every program. If the evaluator can draw it to the surface and make it the central focus of the evaluation effort, he is on the way to alleviating the very real uneasiness that practitioners feel about being judged and having their performances critically rated. (Weiss, 1972, p. 106.)

Another possibility, the reduction of mystery and the fear of secrecy by regular provision to administrators of developing information, is subject to the weakness that it may very well result in modification of the program itself, and thereby jeopardize the original research objectives.

A suggestion which has come out of others' experiences with action research is to reduce conflict by seeing to it (by training or by recruitment) that research and operating staffs are more systematically trained in each others' concerns and objectives.

> Thus researchers with program experience would be more aware of, and responsive to, practitioners' perceptions and needs. One project [the research staff members of which were interviewed by Weiss] provided a clue to the utility of the prescription. The research director was a former [practitioner as were the senior researcher and a third staff member]. While they were personally respected and their research project was accepted by the service staffs, they were no longer perceived as colleagues. According to one informant, 'They have leaped the fence and gone over to the other side.' (Weiss, 1973a, p. 53.)

Greenhouse also discusses briefly a series of partial remedies for the kinds of difficulties we experienced in Portland and which others have had elsewhere. These include manipulation of the reward system, repeated clarification of authority relationships, specialized communications systems (especially when the research involves several levels of sponsoring and host bureaucracies), clear statement of research and operational goal priorities, and, perhaps, a general dissociation of research sponsorship from the organization(s) who have--or seem to have--a vested interest in research and program outcomes.[1]

Suggestions for Another Approach

I will argue that the purposes of the sponsors and performers of evaluation research alike would be substantially served by the adoption of a slightly different approach, the development of a two-level evaluation research strategy. It involves the systematic examination of the degree of implementation of the program in question as a routine first

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[1] This suggestion has also been made by Leonard Goodwin (1973) and by Laurence E. Lynn, Jr. (1973).

step, prior to the study of the program outcomes of interest. It is clear that evaluation of the latter without systematic (and measured) information on the former entails the risk of being incorrect to a degree which no performer or consumer of the research wishes to tolerate. Hargrove has put the suggestion in these terms:

> It is important to make a distinction between implementing a program and evaluating its effectiveness in achieving intended goals. A policy and program may be completely in error in the analysis of the problem at hand and may therefore fail to be effective even though beautifully implemented. We cannot tell if a program is properly targeted for a given problem if it is badly implemented, however, and this seems to be the more common case. In fact, the literature is rife with negative examples. . . . . .In general, we find it difficult to say whether the limitations of the program reside in its initial diagnosis of the problem or in the actual implementation. In either case, the study of implementation can be differentiated from that of program evaluation in its interest in how the program is carried out rather than in how well it works. (Hargrove, 1976, p. 11.)

It might be added that a program may also spuriously appear to work because of improper or incomplete implementation, as was the danger in the case of the intercession of Portland WIN Job Developers in the vouchered OJT process.[2]

The remainder of this discussion will be focussed on description of some of the elements which might go into a systematic approach to implementation analysis, and on suggestions for some of the ways in which a two-level approach to evaluation research might increase the clarity, comprehensiveness, and sophistication of the research results.

As a starting point, there are several facts of program research life which should be recognized as given in some degree in almost any real setting, and which no amount of tinkering or ad hoc problem solving will eliminate to our full satisfaction.[3]

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[2] For more detail on this, and on its effects on the evaluation data, see Richardson (1977).

[3] The suggestions for coping with situation strains described above are all useful in one degree or another and in a variety of specific situations, and should not be overlooked. But by turning the technical question around a little, and putting the emphasis on ways in which systematically to take these kinds of disruptive events into account and in analysis of evaluation data, we may be on firmer ground than is presently generally the case.

First, organizations will adopt innovations to fit as comfortably as possible with existing and emerging interests which are likely to be external to the program being tested. Program staffs will continue to be concerned about the performance of their regular tasks and will continue to exercise considerable ingenuity in co-opting and modifying new program elements.

Second, events external to the experiment as such will occur. Not all of them will have equal impact on all aspects of the program under study, nor on all clients of the program (especially if the program operates over some period of time). In the Portland case, the deepening of the recession at the time the vouchered OJT program was in operation probably had roughly the same impact (in the aggregate) on the voucher clientele. But the temporary freeze of SAU funds during that same program had differential effects, and created at least two groups of clients--those who chose vouchered OJT (before the freeze) and those who chose WIN and whose only option therefore was vouchered OJT (in the case of those clients who required child care or medical services). Similarly, the temporary transfer of regular OJT funds to other WIN programs in Oregon generated two different groups of clients--those who chose vouchered OJT and those who opted for OJT as such (and thus necessarily vouchered OJT). It is not difficult to take these kinds of differential effects of external events upon the program into account empirically, so long as there are not so many of them that the case base for analysis becomes unmanageably small. But the important thing is to know just what it is that happened and when, in order that appropriate empirical indicates can be devised and analytic measures taken.

Further, programs will usually drift. Not only will they "lurch about" but, in the case of complex programs, will do so at different rates. What is more, it is usually in social programs that what may be described as "a" treatment condition is in fact a whole series of treatments, and that they will drift in different ways and in response to different forces. In the voucher case, for example, "the" treatment involved several dimensions: client autonomy in several decisions, negotiation with potential trainers, self-assessment counseling, direct access to labor market information, an allowance to defray some of the expenses associated with the search for a training position, and

provision of a variety of support services during the training search. It was our experience that the several aspects of "the" voucher treatment condition changed and drifted at different times and rates of speed (the first to go was self-assessment counseling, the last the training search allowance).

Next, as many have noted, some degree of conflict of research and operational goals is probably "inevitable," to the extent that it is endemic to the structure of research in operational settings (and there is reason to believe that most is). But, as Greenhouse has argued, goal disparities of this sort are probably also desirable: if ongoing program goals are fully and consistently meshed with the program innovation under study, the "innovation" probably is not that at all (as was nearly the case with vouchered institutional training in Portland). Or, in a different sort of case, if there were no strain between research and operational objectives, we might have grounds to suspect that the research (or the research staff) had been co-opted,[4] a situation which also works to the detriment of the research by minimizing the differences between the "old" and the "new."

In light of these and other factors, it seems reasonable to argue that the implementation of any program is most accurately conceptualized as a variable, one which is susceptible to quantification and manipulation just as any other quantitative variable is. I suggest that we make the (conservative) assumption that implementation will vary from one administrator, one time, one place, and with respect to one program aspect or another, and that these variations will have both direct and indirect effects on the hypothesized program outcomes. To the extent that this is a valid assumption, it also means that what we know about program effects--and what we can know--is a partial function of these kinds of factors. If we were to develop measures of the degree of implementation, it would be possible to take account of these variations (just

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[4] Everhart (1977) reports his experiences in trying to construct and maintain a certain amount of conflict in order both to establish and legitimate his work in a school. Generally speaking, anthropologists are more sensitive to the need to maintain constructive distance than are practitioners in other fields.

as we do with other variables) in the analysis of program outcomes,[5] and to increase the explanatory power of our analyses.

The analysis of data on the Portland voucher project provides several examples of the additional understanding which can be achieved when it is possible to include implementation variables in the analysis of outcomes. One of them has to do with variations in the implementation of the vouchered OJT program so far as the matter of negotiations with OJT employers was concerned. As Greenhouse has described, this was an issue of special sensitivity to the Job Developers in the program, and there were several instances in which WIN staff found the temptation to intercede irresistable, with the result that there were really three groups of "successful" OJT voucher recipients: those who found a training situation entirely on their own (which was the variable of interest to the research), those on whose behalf WIN staff intervened, and a residual group whose training arrangements were "mixed." Ordinarily, one might analyze these "committment-of-voucher" data in terms of varying commitment rates for different demographic and program-exposure groups, and compare the training arrangements of the voucher committers with those of their "regular WIN" OJT counterparts. We did, in fact, do this, with the following (selected) results.

	Vouchered OJT	Regular OJT
Commitment Rate of:		
Men	18	DNA
Mandatory Women	19	DNA
Volunteer women	23	DNA
Average Cost of Training	$2,239	$1,545
Rate of Training Completion	38	33

[5]The extent to which this is not routinely done is especially clear when it comes to so-called post hoc evaluation, when one is commissioned to evaluate program outcomes after they have occurred. A representative example is that of the study conducted by BSSR of factors in WIN program experience which might explain what seemed to be unusually high program dropout rates of young participants (under 22), a survey of former participants in fourteen cities. One of the most consistently strong effects in the aggregate was that of site, or city. For example, the proportion of young clients who were put into OJT arrangements ranged from none in one site to 40 percent in another (Richardson and Dunning, 1975). Clearly, the WIN program was being implemented quite differently in different cities, and general statements about the outcomes of WIN participation for "young clients"

Quite different results were obtained, however, when we took empirically into account known variations in the degree of staff intercessions in the OJT arrangements (the degree of improper implementation).[6]

	Apparent Voucher Commitment Rate	Real Voucher Commitment Rate (Client-arranged OJTS)
Men	18	11
Mandatory Women	19	7
Volunteer Women	23	5

	Client-arranged Vouchered OJT	WIN-arranged "Vouchered" OJT	Regular OJT
Average cost of training	$2,184	$1,710	$1,545
Rate of training completion	43%	36%	33%

The methodology of the study of implementation is not so well developed among performers of evaluation research as is that of the study or program effects. This is probably due less to lack of information about sources of slippage in real research settings than to failure to systematize that knowledge into a generally-applicable analytic model for use in studying variations in implementation. Some of the general provisions a such a systematization might include the following:

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which did not take these variations into account would be misleading. In this particular case (and a few others--see Goodwin, 1977), it was possible to make statistical adjustments for these differences in implementation. In most other cases, the evaluator has not the access to what Weiss has called "the program-as-operated" which would be required in order to make adjustments of this sort.

[6] While this is routinely done in laboratory-type experimentation, it is seldom systematically a feature of designs for research in real settings.

1. Definition of the elements of the program in question which are to be implemented. Among the most important aspects of this defining activity should be the disassembling of complex treatments such that the implementation of each component can be subjected to measurement separately. It is usually not sufficient in the evaluation research per se to assess whether and to what extent "the" treatment has its hypothesized effects. This is particularly the case when "the" treatment is in fact a series of additive and interactive treatments which are not introduced seriatum or in several settings.[7] It is equally important to disaggregate treatments for purposes of the study of implementation.

Different elements of the overall program can and should be given some rating of their importance to the program and to the eventual evaluation. While the failure to implement certain features of the program may be fatal to the entire enterprise improper or incomplete implementation of others will, perhaps, not be so crucial and can be given less weight. In the Portland project, there was a fairly clear distinction between provisions which were essential to the hypothetical underpinnings of the voucher notion, and others which were more in the nature of enabling or support features of the system. For example, withholding from voucher clients of decision-making autonomy, or intercession by WIN staff in negotiations with potential trainers, were considered to be serious implementation problems, because these aspects of the program went to the heart of the ideas which were being tested. Hypothetically stated, the basic notions in question were these:

> Putting decision-making, negotiating and purchasing power into the hands of the consumers of services will increase the likelihood that individual client need will be met adequately.
>
> Clients, . . will make consumption decisions which are at least as good as those made by program agency personnel.
>
> Allowing a client to choose a supplier in terms of his own needs, and thereby not limiting his potential choices to those made available by an agency, broadens his options for both a range of services and a variety of suppliers.
>
> Giving the client the opportunity to participate meaningfully in decisions about his life will increase his skill in dealing with a variety of institutions, and will enhance his self-esteem, his sense of personal efficacy, and his commitment to the accomplishment of his goals. (Richardson and Sharp, 1974, p. 2.)

On the other hand, certain others parts of the system seemed to be less centrally relevant. Self-assessment counseling and direct access to labor market information were two enabling provisions: they were designed to transfer from staff to clients basic information to be used in the decision-making process. The fact that they were utilized at the client's discretion may indicate their relative centrality to the program. Still other features of the program--such as the training search allowance and the provisions for child care, car repair, dental attention, and street (vs. working) clothes during the OJT search[7] might best be characterized as peripheral services; the failure to implement these aspects of the voucher program would probably be less crucial.

In practice, it would probably be useful to focus on the fact that "there is some kind of theory [at least] implicit in almost every program," (Weiss, 1972, p. 106), and to make decisions on which will be considered crucial implementation dimensions, and which not-so-crucial from the standpoint of correcting the evaluation data.[8]

Thus, we left the vouchered OJT experience with the impression that the program had never really been tested, because there were observable attempts to subvert the client-as-negotiator aspect of the system. (At the same time, provisions for training search money and for child and medical care were still intact.) Clearly, some aspects of the program were more important than others.

In general, then, the greatest weight in implementation research should go to those provisions which are operational representations of the central theoretical concerns of the program in question. The assignment of weights to more peripheral aspects of the program is probably in some degree a matter of guesswork, and may be subject to surprising re-assessment in some cases. It is an important guard, though,

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[7] Normally, these are provided by WIN only after training begins.

[8] It is easy to be fooled in these decisions, however. For example, quite late in the OJT phase of the Portland project, we discovered that one Public Welfare Division worker in one of the branch offices had learned that a voucher client was receiving the training search allowance, and counted it as new income. This had the direct effect of raising the price of food stamps for the client in question. Fortunately for the research, this happened late enough that it did not affect the voucher acceptance rate among clients of that branch office (and did not necessitate negotiations with another agency).

against too-hasty judgments that there is nothing to evaluate (since there has been "no" implementation) on the one hand, and on the other, over-optimistic assessments of the possibilities for follow-on evaluation of outcomes.

2. Development of valid indicators of the degree of implementation of each program component, at all relevant levels of the program administration. In the Portland case, this would have included several administrative levels: the intake staff who had control of information on the existence of the voucher option; the counselors and job developers who could (and did) grant or withhold autonomy in decision-making and negotiations with OJT employers; local office administrators who could (and did) intercede in negotiations with training institutions; state and regional administrators who were to pass on training, proposals which would cost more than certain amounts.[9]

3. Careful assessment of what "ordinary interests" may be at stake in implementation of the program, so that one may be sensitive to the points around which controversy or strain (and possible lack of implementation) are likely to develop. Again, the risk the vouchered OJT program posed for job developers in terms of deterioration of relationships with local OJT employers provides a useful illustration. Job developers who in the previous (pre-voucher) year had negotiated a relatively large number of OJT contracts were considered to be those at "high" risk in the voucher system. This measure was helpful in understanding some of the variations in the extent to which voucher clients were (by their own reports) allowed decision-making autonomy in three areas: whether to undertake vouchered OJT, what occupation to train for, and which employers to approach in seeking a training position. Aside from the deviation from expectation of two of the low-risk job

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[9]For example, a serious threat to implementation in the vouchered OJT program arose when a state administrator who was asked for approval of a "high-cost" OJT arrangement rejected it because the client in question had been a participant the year before in the vouchered institutional training program, but had not gone to work afterward. The reason for the rejection (which was not an "official" ground for denying approval) was communicated to the client's team, which then took the position that it would no longer permit any of its clients the voucher option if that was to be a criterion for approval of vouchered training contracts. It did not take long to untangle the situation satisfactorily, but it might not have been so easy a solution in other circumstances.

developers (they allowed autonomy less often even than the high-risk teams did), the risk-autonomy relationship was fairly clear, though not especially strong.[10]

	High-risk Teams	Low-risk Teams (Excluding Two Deviant Teams
Proportion of Clients Reporting Autonomy in:		
Undertaking Vouchered OJT	38	54
Training Occupation	62	73
Training Employer	48	54

The ability to identify probable points of strain and the people for whom they are a problem (and for whom they are not), can yield valuable information on program implementation. It will not be possible to anticipate each relevant point of strain at the outset of the study, of course; new ones are likely to emerge through time, and some may turn out not to present an implementation problem at all in practice. A well-designed model for assessment of implementation processes will allow for continual development of new measures as the need arises.

4. Development of a robust data-gathering strategy, one which will be relatively invulnerable to deliberate attempts to disguise variations in implementation. The negative extremes of this aspect of the implementation assessment model are easy to identify. It would be foolish, for example, to rely entirely on official program records--they far more often reflect central office objectives than they do local office realities. Nor would one be likely to gather useful systematic information from an organizational superior about the behavior of lower staff (since s/he may not in fact have valid information). Just as we ordinarily prefer to gather evaluation-type data from program participants

[10] Clearly, this crude measure of risk, which was developed on an *ad hoc* basis, is not fully satisfactory, and would require considerable refinement if it were to be of general use in the analysis of the data. These findings are reported here, however, for purposes of illustration of some of the possibilities.

themselves rather than from others or from records, so we would be in a stronger position to assess the degree of implementation if the data were to come directly from the "clients" of the innovation, the day-to-day administrators of the program (at all levels).

There are several standard data-gathering approaches which may be suitable for these purposes, though each offers weaknesses as well as strengths. Self-administered questionnaires are easy to standardize and an inexpensive way to collect data but vulnerable to attempts to dissemble. The same is true in large part of face-to-face interview approaches. Interviews with program clients can yie useful data and are probably not as vulnerable to deliberate misreporting, but they are at the same time subject to inaccuracies of respondent recall.

Occasional drop-in visits to the research site offer the potential for a more detailed and realistic view of the actual implementation process as it works in practice, but entails the risk that observations are not made at representative times during the program, or that operations are tailored especially for the observation period.[11] Continued on-site monitoring of implementation can markedly increase the accuracy of observation of actual events and behaviors, but it is an expensive approach and may create some unnecessary problems of conflict and accommodation, such as some of those described by Greenhouse. Participant observation may reduce some of these problems and deepen insight, but may also involve the risk of co-optation of the observer.

The particular data-gathering strategy (or combination of approaches) which will yield a maximum of useful and valid data on implementation at a minimum cost in operating expenses and in organizational conflict will certainly vary with circumstances, with the particular sensitivities

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[11] In the context of discussion of problems connected with part-time commitments of evaluators to the research operation, Weiss shares this horror story: "In one project, far fewer patients entered the program than had been anticipated. Accordingly, the program staff decided to admit as patients the groups that had formerly been designated as controls. Because he was not on the spot, the evaluator did not have a chance to argue the case for the control groups. He did not even hear about the decision until over a week had passed and the move was practically irrovocable. (Weiss, 1973a, p. 53.)

of the situation,[12] with the length of the implementation period, with the complexity of the program under study, and so forth. But it is likely that, with further study, a generally-applicable "best option" approach, or a general ranking of the desirability of all options could be devised for use in any study of program implementation.

Clearly, there are a good many considerations to be taken into account in development of a coherent and general approach to implementation research which have not been addressed here. My attempt has been to specify some of the beginnings of the development of a useful model. This discussion amounts finally to a proposal that systematic work along these lines be begun.

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[12] For example, certain implementation studies could very well involve the revelation of "organizational secrets," and would call for approaches which eventually become relatively unobtrusive, such as participant observation. Others might not, and could satisfactorily be carried out with other approaches.

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